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#102

WHAT ARE JOHN'S FIRST THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF X-MEN? DOES HE HAVE ANY SECOND THOUGHTS? AND CAN HE MAKE SENSE OF IT ALL?

AUSTRALIAN ARTIST
JOHN DIXON
FROM AIR HAWK TO ROCKETEER

FOLLOWING IN SOME BIG FOOTSTEPS: SWAMP THING SCRIPTER
NANCY A. COLLINS

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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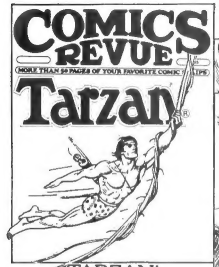

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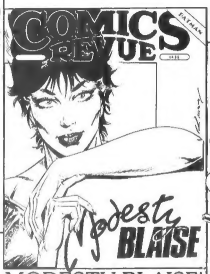

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UP FRONT

In the issues leading up to #100, I asked for responses to a survey about COMICS INTERVIEW magazine. To my delight, a deluge of constructive criticism and creative feedback resulted. A representative selection of those responses follows:

What I Like Most About COMICS INTERVIEW Is —

"What else, the interviews."

"The interviews are whole (without certain words excised, as with COMICS SCENE). The letters page is a favorite, especially the recent discussion of Fantagraphics and THE COMICS JOURNAL. Unfortunately, we usually only get a page or two. I'm also fond of your comments and reminiscences in the 'Up Front' section."

"You show lots of artwork."

"What I like best is the artwork included."

"The original art that accompanies interviews, the only chance some of us come to owning them."

"In-depth interviews with some of comics' most talented people, and original pencils and inks."

"Interviews with a lot of the artists/writers whose comics I enjoy."

"What I like most about COMICS INTERVIEW is the interviews; they are not only interesting (90% success rate) but provide insights into the people and their work. Quite a few times I've gone to check out an artist's work based on an interview. I like the feeling of getting to know these people a little."

"For me to like anything this much is a positive thing. The first time I picked up this book I knew it was an interview book and wanted to read a **John Byrne** interview. Good stuff. No whitewash."

"I like the fact that the interviews are not limited to just writers and artists, and cover other countries as well as the USA/UK."

"The artwork reproduced directly from pencils. It is a great 'behind the scenes' approach, and as an artist, I think pencils alone are more beautiful than inked works."

"The variety of interviews. You really never know who you might read about next except they will usually be interesting."

"I like the concept of an all-interview magazine. The style of interviewing is also important; pertinent questions without being antagonistic make for a friendly interview that is also informative. Not every interview has to dig up dirt in order to stir up a controversy to provoke sales. That is one of the main reasons I stopped reading COMICS JOURNAL."

"When I can finish reading an interview and feel I've learned something about the project that I wouldn't have from 'the fan press' I'm happy. I also enjoy 'Vital Statistics.' They should be mandatory for *every* interview. Issue #99 is an excellent example of interviewing."

"Interviews of people not directly related to the business, rock stars, movie stars, script writers, collectors. It separates your interviews from the rest of the bunch."

"I like the integration of artwork with the interviews."

"Uncensored. We get the nitty gritty on disputes, opinions, etc. Also, the diversity; you don't simply cater to Marvel or even comic *books* in particular."

Next: ***What I Hate Most About CI Is —***

-Dave K

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"I grew up in the area known as ArkLaMiss, bayou

Novelist Nancy A. Collins is best known to comic fans for her current work on *SWAMP THING*. Collins has managed to bring her unique retrospect and vast knowledge of southern folklore into play within the pages of *SWAMP THING*.

I caught up with her at the New Orleans Science Fiction and Fantasy Festival VI. As one might expect from the woman behind DC's favorite muck monster, I found her possessing a marvelously earthy sense of humor. And, unlike Alan Moore, one would feel safe to be left alone in a room with her.

But (sigh) that wasn't to be the case . . .

Having said that, let's just move along to the interview we just had to call . . . "THE ALL NUDE INTERVIEW SESSION WITH NANCY COLLINS."

(Because she said we could) . . .

BILL KIEFFER: *I'm talking with Nancy A. Collins. What does the "A" stand for?*

NANCY A. COLLINS: Averill. It's Saxon. It means little bird or bird of the wood. There's only like two or three people that have had this name and it seems to be split between males and females. It's a name that's been handed down through the family.

BILL: *And you live in Louisiana now?*

NANCY: Right, I've lived in New Orleans since 1982. I was born in Arkansas in 1959 and moved in 1981. I spent a year

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Nancy A. Collins
Born: 10 September 1959 — McGehee, Arkansas
Scripter On: SWAMP THING
Published Credits: SUNGLASSES AT NIGHT, TEMPTER
Favorite Horror Writer: Ramsey Campbell
Favorite Artist: J.K. Potter
Favorite Music: Alternative
Favorite Musician: Robyn Hitchcock
Favorite Flavor of Ice Cream: Cream Cheese
Favorite Monster Movie: (tie) HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER; PARENTS
Favorite Industrial Disaster: The Triangle Shirtwaists Factory Fire

NANCY COLLINS

WELL, PARDON ME. I'M BLOODY SORRY I CAN'T POP OUT OF ME BOD AND GO FARTIN' THROUGH THE GREEN! NOT EVERYONE'S AN ELEMENTAL, Y'KNOW.
IF YA-YA HAD NOT...TOLD ME... YOU WERE SUMMONED HERE...BY THE SPIRIT OF THE SWAMP...I WOULD HAVE LEFT YOU... TO YOUR OWN DEVICES...
IT IS BAD ENOUGH... ABBY AND TEFE... ARE THREATENED BY THIS FIEND... BUT TO LEARN HE IS ONE OF... YOUR ANCESTORS... DOES NOTHING TO ENDEAR YOU TO ME...
OH, GOD OFF, YOU SANCTIMONIOUS CABBAGE! I DIDN'T ASK YOU TO USE ME AS A BLOODY SPERM BANK--
...WHICH MEANS, OF COURSE, THAT YER PRECIOUS LITL MERRY SUNSHINE IS KIN T' THE SLIGHTER, TOO!

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1991 DC Comics, Inc.

country near Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi."

in Memphis, Tennessee and then moved down here around the time of Mardi Gras '82. I grew up in the area known as Arklamiss, which is the bayou country near Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. I was born within 15 miles of the Mississippi River, you know, floods, alligators, that sort of thing.

BILL: *So you feel right at home living in New Orleans.*

NANCY: Pretty much. I've spent most of my life within hailing distance of the Mississippi River.

BILL: *Were you married when you came to New Orleans?*

NANCY: No, I was married in 1989 about a month after SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK, my first novel, was released from NAL/ONYX. I was married about a year and a half.

BILL: *Let's talk a little about your novels, SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK and TEMPTER, which has voodoo influences.*

NANCY: Very much so, and rock and roll. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *How long have you had this fascination with horror?*

NANCY: Quite a long time. I guess it

"I wanted to do 'white trash from Hell'—a TWIN PEAKS

goes back to when I was itty-bitty. One of my favorite books when I was a kid was FLAT STANLEY. The book was about this kid that used to run through doors and slam them and one day the chiffarobe fell on him and squashed him flat. It didn't kill him, just squashed him flat and it made him two-dimensional. It wasn't really bad being flat because he could fold himself up and mail himself or slide under doors. I remember one day he got caught in a window shade and it was like weeks before his parents found him. I can't remember how he got three-dimensional again but it was one of my favorite stories. Another of my favorites was a Dr. Seuss story about a pair of green pants. They didn't have anyone in them but they would walk around and stuff. One kid sees the green pants and they start chasing after him and it scares him because the kid didn't know what the pants would do when they caught up to him. Basically, as it turned out, the pants just wanted to be worn but as a kid the concept was scary. These stories had some very weird, horrific undertones.

BILL: *Do you like taking mundane concepts and gearing them towards the horrific?*

NANCY: Not necessarily, it's more like I have people that are just hanging around and they have this weirdness that ends up in their lap whether they want it or not. It's like things get so weird that you're not even willing to admit that they're weird.

BILL: *How would this relate to your work and the characters in SWAMP THING?*

NANCY: Basically, what I tried to do with SWAMP THING, when talking with my editor, **Stuart Moore**, a great guy . . .

BILL: *TOR Books, right?*

NANCY: He was originally an editor for St. Martins so he has a strong editing background. Anyway, what I said was that I wanted to do like these white trash from Hell stories, sort of like a TWIN PEAKS feel and he just kind of moaned. *(Laughter.)* No one at the time knew what I was talking about but then after I turned in my first couple of scripts everyone said, "hey, this is just like TWIN PEAKS." *(Laughter.)* I wasn't going for the camp elements but rather the horrific elements. Stuff like the bit with Bob and the torture sequences we got to see with Laura and Bob, the elements that made it creepy. I think I managed to capture some of it in ANNUAL #6 and #110, which involves the evangelist serial killer that poisons the communion wine wherever he goes.

Pencil panel from SWAMP THING by one of comicdom's most beloved . . .

feel. No one at the time knew what I was talking about."

. . . female illustrators, Jan Duursema.

His idea was that if they believe in God and drink the wine, they won't die. Of course, they've all been tested and found wanting. Number III has a lot of stories from Creole and Cajun legend and folklore. It also has an adaptation of the true story of the life and death of **Amadie**, the father of Cajun Zydeco music who was killed, beaten to death. He was a black man, an accordion player, that was beaten to death for wiping his face with a white woman's handkerchief. This guy was repeatedly beaten and then they ran a Model "T" over his larynx. It was a true-to-life EC story except for the fact that they didn't have people coming back to life and getting revenge. In a way, I altered the story so that there was some sense of justice as opposed to the reality of the situation.

BILL: *I really liked the Last Musician that appeared in SWAMP THING. The Ax Man was really excellent, the blood on the ax . . .*

NANCY: I thought it was OK but what I know about the Ax Man of New Orleans I was going, "nyaaaah."

BILL: *So that was based on a real character?*

NANCY: Well yeah, there was a real murderer called the Ax Man. He was probably a Cosa Nostra enforcer because all of the guys that got killed were Italian-Greek grocers that were behind on their protection money. The Ax Man is very much a part of New Orleans culture. There was even a piece of music composed called the Ax Man's Jazz. The Ax Man was like, "I'm going to kill anyone whose house I don't hear jazz music coming out of." You have to understand that at this time, around the turn of the century, jazz music was considered black music, nigger music; stuff that was played in the whorehouses. Even well-to-do blacks didn't play it in their house. He was basically our Jack the Ripper because he wrote taunting letters to the paper and stuff like that.

BILL: *I wasn't aware of the legend. But the one satisfying thing about the story was that at the end Swampy comes out and the Ax Man gets a splinter in his finger and Swampy animates it so that the Ax Man has all of these splinters coming out of his body.*

NANCY: It still doesn't look like he's dead though. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *That's just it, you don't know if he's dead or alive . . . or unhappy . . .*

NANCY: Or hurting, like ouch or something. *(Laughter.)* That was one of those stories that had potential. Know-

. . . and you thought *you've* had strange relationships.

Nominated for two Harvey Awards (Best New Talent and Best New Title, 1990), Terry LaBan is a '90s artist with '60s sensibilities. Elvis Costello asked the musical question: "What's so funny about peace, love, and understanding?", and LaBan answers with UNSUPERVISED EXISTENCE, a 'relationship' comic written from the heart that doesn't forget the head. It's about great expectations, noble failures, attitude, and affection.

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"We're keeping the human aspect of SWAMP THING."

ing what I do about the Ax Man I could have made it a totally different story.

BILL: *I just don't feel that Swampy is a revengeful type of guy.*

NANCY: Actually, he could be. I have him like he could really care less. The way I look at it, Swampy has evolved so far that we shouldn't even be able to understand his thinking processes at all. Anything that is capable of recreating its physical appearance and dropping it at a moment's notice . . . well, the concept of physical presence, of being human, we shouldn't be able to understand it. Theoretically, he should only have a minor interest in having a family. Having a comic based on a character that we have no way of knowing what he thinks or how he feels or isn't motivated by anything we understand leads to dull reading. *(Laughter.)* We're trying to keep the human aspect of Swamp Thing who his wife always calls Alec. Although his friends don't call him that. I think I may get around to having Chester call him Alec although Chester is more Abby's friend. In a lot of ways, Chester has been there when it has counted for Abby more times than Swampy has. I'm finally getting around to Swampy trying to be friends with Chester. Not like a drinking buddy but like "you helped my family."

BILL: *Kind of like they're going to go out and do male bonding stuff.* (Laughter.)

NANCY: Basically, what I want to do is focus on the people around Swampy and how they relate to him and his ability to manipulate their surroundings. One of the first things I did was chuck the first-person narration that has been a part of SWAMP THING since **Len Wein** because at this time I realized we shouldn't understand his narration and by this point he shouldn't care whether we know what he's thinking. He doesn't have Alec's soul and he's never been human, he just used to think he was human. I just felt that the first-person Swampy perspective has been way overused and it's time to see him from the outside rather than see him as the central hero. To see him as a more natural force; not as Superman but rather as a force of nature itself. Does that make any kind of sense?

BILL: *It does. It was fun with the first-person stuff when he was learning all of this stuff but now that it's second nature . . .*

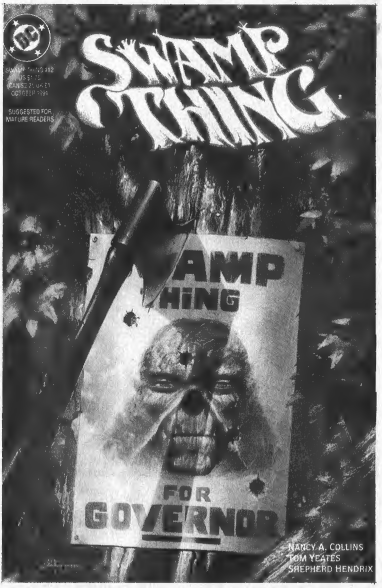
NANCY: Sure, he doesn't think about it at all now, about picking up and dropping bodies. And they're all basically different from one another although they all have the basic Swamp Thing characteristics like they have beetle brows and a weird trifoliate nose.

BILL: *Tell us a little about the argument scene between John Constantine and Swampy.*

NANCY: Swampy doesn't really trust John Constantine and Abby doesn't like him at all. I think Swampy respects him on a certain level. I think John (Constantine) likes them both but it's against his religion to show that he likes anybody.

BILL: *Well, his friends keep dying.* (Laughter.)

NANCY: Yeah, it's not a good thing to have John say that he likes you. *(Laughter.)* Plus I think that Swampy feels funny when Constantine is around him, Abby and the baby because the baby looks so much like Constantine. In the scene, I have Constantine admitting that he really doesn't know everything that is going on. It's smoke and mirrors to make him look better, it's like, Give me a break, I'm not like one of these idiots like Dr. Fate or Phantom Stranger or any of these other guys that wear their knickers inside-out. It's like he just has these guesses or feelings, he has suspicions, that he knows he needs to be somewhere at a certain time. Swampy treats him like he knows more than he does because he



John Higgins' cover for issue #112.

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THE FIRST TIME

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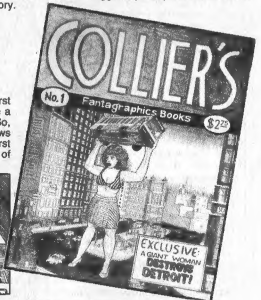

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"I know about the South and its swamp and its folklore."

did originally. Constantine also admits to Swampy that something is wrong, that he's changed. And it's like, "yeah, well, having my dad chopped up by a serial killer and having a slight bout of terminal cancer tends to alter how you see things." Swampy tries to be sympathetic towards Constantine and he can't handle it. He actually calls him John and he's like, "look, I'd rather our relationship be on something other than a first-name basis." *(Laughter.)* I think that Swampy has a better understanding of Constantine and he's willing to cut him a little slack; Abby, on the other hand, never will. Constantine is a fun character to write and I also gave him another distasteful ancestor in the form of a hellish, demon-worshipping pirate called Dark Conrad Constantine. Basically Dark Conrad goes up and down the Spanish main killing people for sacrifices. One of the people he managed to alienate is Jean LaFitte.

BILL: *Captain Crunch's arch enemy?*

NANCY: *(Laughter.)* No, not LaFoot, LaFitte. His ghost will be making an appearance in SWAMP THING. You can't tell a pirate story in Louisiana and not have him appear. They're basically Lovecraftian pirates from Hell so most of the pirates have heads like hammerhead sharks and squid heads. We're relying a lot on what I know about the South and its swamps and its folklore. The swamps are haunted down here with witches, ghosts, werewolves — all kinds of stuff. I'm also using some local fictional and non-fictional celebrities in SWAMP THING. I'm using Ignatius Reilly from A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES as a walk-on. I'm using a lot of inside jokes that I don't expect anyone from outside of Louisiana to get. To me an inside joke is no fun if everyone knows what it is.

BILL: *You mentioned something about Chester trying to get a job in Houma.*

NANCY: Yeah, Houma is a real town located in Terrebonne Parish. It's almost all swamp. I have Liz and Chester breaking up with Liz finally coming out of the closet. Liz basically says, "Look, my lover's left town and I'm going to join her in Portland, Oregon."

BILL: *Liz? I missed this. I know she was raped like on a daily basis . . .*

NANCY: Yeah, I finally decided that Liz was gay. She likes Chester, but she just decided that her life is going to be gay and that she has a lesbian lover that she follows to Portland. Chester can't handle this so he gets really bombed out of his mind and decides to go cry on Abby's shoulder. He drives to the edge of the swamp and walks the rest of the way. Abby's like playing with the baby on the front lawn and she looks up and there's Chester covered with mud and leeches. *(Laughter.)* It's funny because Chester is bombed out of his mind and the swamp is full of water moccasins and alligators and they leave him alone. *(Laughter.)* The bottom line is that Chester ends up getting a new roommate that is a gay young man that has a black lover. I'm introducing an inter-racial gay couple.

BILL: *The only other gay character in the DC universe that I'm aware of is Danny The Street in DOOM PATROL.*

Another cover painting by Higgins — from Swampy's sixth annual.

NANCY: I've only just started reading DOOM PATROL . . . the trouble is going to arise because the characters are an inter-racial gay couple. Not because they're gay but because they're inter-racial. The issue where they meet is like the young white guy is the lover of one of the people killed in the Purdue annual story #6. The gay couple will meet at Mardi Gras and it's like love at first sight. The black guy is like this big ball player type that works in the oilfields. They'll be just like a regular married couple. There will be more than a few questions concerning Chester's manliness. I'm going to put Chester through some serious

"Editors are pleased with what I have turned in. What

changes and I think he'll come out the better for it.

BILL: *That's interesting because my household has five people in it and two of them are gay lovers. One is in the Navy and people don't ask him questions, they ask me. They ask me things like, "Aren't you afraid of sleeping at night, aren't you afraid he's going to try something on you?"*

NANCY: Actually that tells me more about the sexuality of the people that ask the questions.

BILL: *What will you be doing with Abby and the baby?*

NANCY: I'm not allowed to kill either of them so I'm being forced to develop the characters. With Abby, I'm going to give her a more rigid character. She's had enough of people poking their noses in her business and she's going to be more protective of her family and her privacy. These things will manifest themselves in issues 112 and 113 which are the Swamp Thing for Governor issues.

BILL: *One thing I noticed in the book is that time appears to be real time.*

NANCY: Close, I'm not going to keep the baby up to real time because they move so fast you have no time to get any sense of them as a person unless you're living with them on a day-to-day basis. The baby (Tefe) will stay between eighteen months to two years for a little while. The other thing with Tefe is that she will see a serious decrease in her powers. I'm going to introduce a new Elemental that has basically volunteered for the job of a nanny because they

More pencils from Jan Duursema.

they want, yet different enough to come across as new."

YOU DARE TO THREATEN ME? ME!?! A SERVITOR OF THEY WHO WALKED BEFORE? YOU PATHETIC BLADE OF GRASS!
WHO ARE YOU THAT I SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF YOU?!?

Panel from SWAMP THING #115. Pencilled by Tom Mandrake with inking by Kim DeMulder.

realize that Swamp Thing and Abby can't take care of her all of the time. Basically we're talking an Elemental Mary Poppins.

BILL: *If this were Marvel then basically an Agatha Harkness type of character.*

NANCY: Yeah, right. The character was another Swamp Thing maybe, Alicia Holland or something like that. She was an Industrial Revolution Swamp Thing creation. Right now her working name is Dame Verte as in the Lady in the Green. We'll also see the reappearance of the Bad Man, the child molester killer that appears in ANNUAL #6. One of the fun things is that Swampy is going to make it to Mardi Gras and find a lot of people dressed as Swampy and Abby, some of them not very well. *(Laughter.)* That should be a fun issue to write.

To the best of my knowledge Swamp Thing has not been to New Orleans since the series moved to Louisiana. The Mardi Gras story has another fun character from New Orleans called the Lord of Misrule which is the King of the Carnival and rules New Orleans for a day. The culture is very different down here. It's a little bit European as well as Caribbean and we keep a lot of our attitudes and myths and legends. I want to give SWAMP THING that element of myth of which Swamp Thing is a part of. There are myths of swamp-things down here. They're called rooga-roo by the Cajuns. My editors at DC have been very pleased with what I have turned in as far as the feel of the book. It's similar to what they want and yet it's different enough that it comes across as being new. At this point Swamp Thing is being accepted by the Cajuns in the swamp as their protector. In my stories he comes to the rescue more than once and they're finally starting to like him and recognize his importance by giving him things to keep him and his wife there.

BILL: *I get the impression that you were laying the groundwork as if a religion was starting to develop with Lobo.*

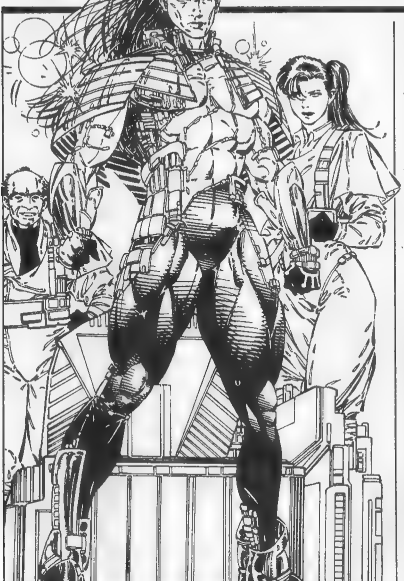
NANCY: Not necessarily a religion, more of a healer or herbalist, if you will. He will be having a lot more appearances as well as Chester.

BILL: *If Chester survives.* (Laughter.)

NANCY: He'll survive, but he'll be different, hopefully in a better way.

WRITER/ARTIST

ON RETU[illegible]TO X-MEN: "This is a big deal for



JOHN BYRNE

The comics industry got something of a shock a few months ago when it was announced that Chris Claremont, writer of THE UNCANNY X-MEN for more than 15 years, would no longer script that title or its top-selling new sister series, X-MEN. Speculation raged on who would replace him. It was answered very quickly — and as you no doubt know by now, the new scripter (working from artist Jim Lee's plots) is a name not unfamiliar to X-fans: John Byrne . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *I guess everybody's first question upon hearing that John Byrne will be writing the X-MEN is — how does it feel to return to this set of characters after something like a decade?*

JOHN BYRNE: Eleven years. It feels a lot like coming home, which is very strange — not at all the reaction I would have expected. It took about a week for it to *start* feeling like that, actually. My first reaction was more . . . prosaic; more along the lines of "Oh, another job, another assignment." Then, slowly, over the space of a week, I began to think, "This is a big deal. This is a big deal for the fan community; this is a big deal for the comics industry," and, eventually, "This is a big deal for *me!*"

It *is* a big deal for me. It's interesting to sit down and look at these guys and see how far they've come and how much they've changed since the point I left having anything to do with them. And, of course, to measure how fast it will be and how long it will be before I can get them *back* to where they were when I left them! That may take a while.

PAT: *Give me John Byrne's take on who these people are — as much as you can at this point.*

JOHN: If I remember correctly . . . Gee, I don't even remember which book has which team now —

PAT: *That's OK; just name the character and we'll go from there.*

JOHN: All right. *Cyclops:* Who is Mr. X-Men to me, always will be. He was my favorite character when I was 14 or 15 years old, reading the book; he was my favorite character when I was drawing

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the fan community, for the comics industry and for me."

"...UNTIL I KNOW ALL THAT IS TO BE KNOWN!"
WELL, LADY?
THIS HAS ALL BEEN MOST... INVIGORATING, HAS IT NOT?
INDEED IT HAS, GAMESMASTER.
INDEED IT HAS.
AND ONE CANNOT HELP BUT WONDER HOW MUCH MORE IS TO IT WILL BECOME...
...WHEN MY UNWITTING UPSTARTS LEARN THE TRUE NATURE OF OUR LITTLE GAME.
AND THE ACTUAL PRIZE FOR WHICH THEY ALL STRIVE SO MIGHTILY!

These two pages: Art from John's third UNCANNY X-MEN job, issue #283.

the book -- yes, boys and girls, *not* Wolverine, but Cyclops. He is the lynchpin around which the whole concept rotates.

Then there's *Jean Grey*, who doesn't seem to be calling herself Marvel Girl these days.

PAT: *Are you going to come up with a code name for that character?*

JOHN: That might be a good idea. Marvel Girl is, perhaps, no longer appropriate. Marvel *Woman* is just goofy. *(Laughter.)* Marvel Woman sounds like the kind of name a bad sitcom would use for a superhero. The name Marvel Girl never told us what she did . . . so there's no real justification for clinging to it, anyway.

So, yes, one of the things we'll have to do is figure out whether or not Jean gets a code name out of all this

Jean is, of course, again, one of the founding members, one of the core group. She has been through a lot of crap over the years -- a lot of which I was personally involved with, so I can freely and happily call it crap because I was

"I think I know who Wolverine is, since I take the

there at the time. The Phoenix stuff and all that, which I now look back on and think of as "Oh God — why did we do that?" Obviously, we'll be doing as little of that as possible durng my tenure on X-MEN.

The Beast is another member, another founding father. He's blue and furry again. He talks like himself now, not like whatever that was that **Steve Englehart** turned him into. So he feels more like he's one of the old guys. He was always a fun character; I always liked the idea of the "bouncing, bombastic Beast," as we used to call him.

Iceman: Another founding father, and a character who, even as a kid, I never really got a fix on. I'm not really sure what will happen with him.

Once again, I should point out that **Jim Lee** and **Whilce Portacio** have already plotted several months' worth of arcs for both books, so I don't really have to worry about where the characters are going.

PAT: *On the other hand, even doing just the scripting, don't you feel you have to know who the characters are in order for them to "sound" right?*

JOHN: Certainly — and I'm going to make my insidious presence felt quite quickly, steering things into storylines that I want to do. I've already talked to Jim and Whilce and they're both very agreeable to the things I would like to see happen on the books.

Speech idioms are not really that tough. Most people in comic books talk in a kind of short-hand anyway. Banshee has always been obviously Irish because he says "Boyo" and things like that. *(Laughter.)* The only character I'm anticipating having any kind of problem with in that sense is *Gambit*, who is supposed to be a Cajun. That's an accent I am utterly unfamiliar with. Looking at the book, it appears he says "Cher" every once in a while — or "Cherie." I think I'd like to figure out something more than that before I advance that particular character

PAT: *Cajun is one of those dialects that's very hard to write down because so much of it relies on accent and bit.*

JOHN: Rhythm. Yes. Transliterated, it reads like "dese and dose"; it could be a Brooklyn accent. "Dat dere, over dere, dat kind'a ting dere."

PAT: *It's difficult to figure out how to transliterate something like "Ah*

ICEMAN! THESE BEINGS WHO FIRST CAME THROUGH THE PORTAL ARE TERRIFIED OF THE NEWCOMERS --
--YET THERE ARE ONLY THREE OF THEM!
WHO ARE THESE MEN WHO COMMAND SUCH TERROR?
BEATS ME, RUSKIE!
DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANYONE HERE INTERESTED IN MAKING FORMAL INTRODUCTIONS, EITHER!

Splash page from UNCANNY X-MEN #283, "Bishop's Crossing." Next page: John's own notes say it all, "looking for my NAMOR . . . ."

credit and/or blame for a lot of what he became."

guar-AHN-tee!"

JOHN: So, in that sense, Gambit's the only one who scares me.

Rogue: I think I have a pretty good fix on her. She's having a pretty good time with it, near as I can tell. That's pretty much the way I'll be playing her. Though it seems like she may have lost her powers — I'm not sure; I haven't had to write her yet. I've been asking the questions as the characters come up in the books. I call **Bob Harras** or I call **Jim Lee** and say, "All right, where are we now with this guy?"

Archangel: He's the first one I'm going to be campaigning for major changes in. Sorry, Walt and Weezie. I want him back as the Angel, as fast as possible. I've already told Bob I don't really like the furry Beast — but he does — so I told him I'd trade. I'll let him keep the furry Beast if they'll let me turn Angel back into his real self.

One of the reasons I want to do that, of course, is that I *know* Angel and I'm not really sure who Archangel is. Call it lazy if you want, but I'd rather have the characters in that state where I recognize them.

Storm: She's the leader of one of the teams. I don't really know where Storm stands right now. I know she's a lot harder and a lot colder than she was when I was doing the book. I'm going to have to do some reading — some supplemental reading, as it were — to determine just how much harder and colder she is. I gave her a particularly tough line in the first issue I scripted and **Bob Harras** suggested it was *too* tough, so we softened it substantially.

PAT: *Let me think who you haven't mentioned -- Psylocke:*

JOHN: *Psylocke:* From what I can tell she's a pretty straight-forward tough female character with a heart of gold. I may be totally wrong on that. By the time I come to write her, I may find she's very different from the fix I have.

She has a wonderfully visual power: I love the psychic dagger she goes around sticking into people's heads. I can see where that would be fun to play with.

PAT: *And you haven't mentioned Wolverine!*

JOHN: *Wolverine,* of course! He's in the same group with the Beast, which strikes me as redundant somehow.

I think I know who Wolverine is, since I take the credit and/or blame for a lot of what Wolverine became. He was pretty much a cipher when I came on the book. As I run excitedly reminding everyone, Chris wanted to write him out of the

"When I was a kid I always hated Professor X."

book when I first came on . . . and I remember saying, "I'm not going to let you write the only Canadian out of the book!" I was very patriotic in those days. I got over that when I moved down here.

I know Wolverine is a little more . . . noble, shall we say? He worries about it a little more than he used to in my day, when he was simply a homicidal maniac. I would like to steer him, if I can, a little more to that concept — but since he has his own book, and his own series in MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS, and is in 27 other projects, he's the one I actually have the least handle on.

In fact, I just scripted — I'm not going to draw this; I'm not insane — a two-page WHERE'S WALDO? parody for WHAT TH', called "Where's Wolverine?" We're hoping to get **Sergio Aragones** to draw this: It's a two-page spread of just about every character in the Marvel Universe fighting each other. There's a little box in the corner that says, "Actually, Wolverine isn't here. He's busy appearing in 27 other titles this month."

PAT: *Colossus?*

JOHN: *Colossus:* Peter seems to have changed very little since the days when I was doing the book. He used to be a tough guy with the soul of a poet, and now he seems to be manifesting his poet's soul by drawing pictures. From what I've seen when he's not running around being possessed by the Shadow King, he seems unchanged.

So, for the most part, except for newer ones like Rogue and Gambit, and the ones who have gone through major transformations, like Storm and Archangel, I don't anticipate a great deal of trouble hooking into them, right off the top.

PAT: *What about Professor X?*

JOHN: *Professor X:* when I was a kid I always hated Professor X. I also always hated Reed Richards. I hated the smart ones who were in charge. And that's pretty much the way I'm going to be dealing with Professor X — the smart one who's in charge. He's the boss, the head of the team; he's the one who sits back home and says "Go out and get in trouble . . . and I'll watch."

My take on him is that he is somewhat aloof, somewhat distant. Every three or four issues he gets one panel where he gets to say, "Oh, my poor X-Men — I worry about you all the time. By the way, go out and get killed." *(Laughter.)*

I'm being kind of glib here.

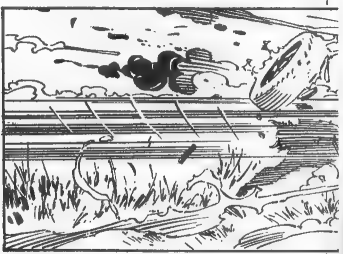
PAT: *I commented to somebody that I thought the problem with a mentor figure who is a telepath is that he starts to be like the coach with a radio connection to the quarterback's helmet.*

JOHN: Very much so. When Chris and I were doing the book, Chris wanted to get him out of the wheelchair and walking around and involved in the stories — which he did when I left. I argued against that because I felt that a mobile Professor X immediately makes the rest of the X-Men redundant.

This guy is virtually unbeatable, as he demonstrated in the first half-dozen issues of the first series, when it was Professor X who came in at the end and actually beat both the Vanisher and the Blob, by walking in and saying, essentially, "OK — you're not bad guys anymore." ZAP! Or "You forget ever having fought us!" ZAP!

And I said, "God — if he could just walk in and do this, he'd be impossible. The rest of the X-Men would be reduced to sitting on the sidelines, eating popcorn and watching Professor X trash the bad guys."

PAT: *I also note that between the two teams — counting that Jean apparently has her telepathy back to some extent — the X-Men have three telepaths. And if you think having Wolverine and the Beast on the same team is redundant —*



"I'm pushing for a housecleaning — mutant massacre."

JOHN: Yeah, well . . . personally, I'm not that thrilled with the break-up of the whole team, as they divided them between the two books. If I had been in charge at the time, I would have been much more inclined to have the old guys in UNCANNY and the new guys in X-MEN . . . and not try to have this weird sort of intermingling.

PAT: *Maybe you can convince them, over the course of time, to do it your way?*

JOHN: I've already talked to Jim and Whilce about that.

My fiendish scheme is just to have the two teams guest-star back and forth between the two books to the point where we just forget that they're guest-starring and just leave them there. Of course, the other plan would be to just play the book as a bi-weekly and just pull whichever characters I need for a particular story.

"Why do we have two books? Just so we can have more mutants for the money?"

PAT: *Without revealing any great secrets, can you give me a rundown of the direction we'll see in future stories?*

JOHN: They have some kind of major arc running through both books as I come aboard, called "Mutant Genesis," which leads to the creation of X-MEN #1. I come on with UNCANNY #281, so I get sort of dropped in the middle of that. I'm really not even sure what that whole storyline is about . . . except that I know it involves the Hellfire Club and a team of young types — sort of junior Hellfire Club — called the Upstarts, who are running around knocking off Hellfire members. That's their initiation into the group — to kill one of the older guys to prove they are worthy of being in the Upstarts.

One of the Upstarts has a particularly interesting ability: He can pull objects out of time and he has pulled himself a whole squadron of future Sentinels. So he has this bunch of super-tough Sentinels running around, trashing mutants left, right and center. And non-mutants — they go after Pierce and his Reavers down in Australia.

That's what's cooking for the first while. In the midst of this, they want to introduce a new character who will become an X-Man. The first major story arc that I, myself, am pushing for is a major house cleaning. "Let's do the mutant massacre but this time let's really massacre mutants." Just knock off about 85 percent of the mutants in the world, because there are far too many of them. Let's try to get back to square one: You have good mutants and bad mutants, and every once in a while a new mutant shows up and we have to race to get to the new mutant before the bad guys get there.

My take on Magneto is that he's a horrible, rotten bad guy — no matter what Chris says. He's in the other camp in all this.

PAT: *There are a number of other characters who have been with the X-Men, but — in the split between the two books — are fading into woodwork: Banshee, Forge, Jubilee. Do you have any plans for them? Have you talked with Jim and Whilce? Will we at least see them?*

JOHN: No real plans at the moment.

I have absolutely no real fix on Jubilee — other than the fact that she looks like she was drawn by **Al Capp** — if **Al Capp** drew Robin as a girl, basically. I have no real sense of who or what she is.

As far as Banshee and Forge: Maybe I'm being an old-fashioned kind of guy, but I like Banshee the way we left him when Chris and I were doing the book — off on Muir Island making nice-nice with

"I like the Banshee the way Chris and I left him"

Moira. But now Muir Island has been blown up, too. That was one of the first things *I* suggested: "Let's blow up Muir Island!" "OK — we're already doing that!" So I don't really know what Banshee's situation will be.

I haven't got a clue who Forge is.

PAT: *I always liked Forge's power. I like the muiants who have powers that aren't terribly flashy but, if you stop and think about it, are awfully useful. I always thought Forge had an extraordinarily useful ability.*

JOHN: What is it? I haven't been able to figure out what he does.

PAT: *He is an instinctive inventor. Tell him you need something to do "x" and he'll build it — from what he's got on hand. Sort of a super MacGyver.*

JOHN: Or Lex Luthor in the old days. "I'll make a time machine out of an aspirin and an old radio."

PAT: *Something like that, yeah.*

JOHN: That sounds like one of those "how does this function as a mutant power" things Chris used to come up with. I don't know — sounds like he might be useful. This will all go into my supplemental reading.

PAT: *As you get more and more involved in the two X-Men books, to the point where you're co-plotting, how will it affect your other assignments?*

JOHN: I don't, at this point, anticipate it affecting my other assignments at all.

I'm already phasing off IRON MAN, which was planned all along. I've got about a story and a half left to do on IRON MAN, somewhere around #278 or #279 I will have told all the Iron Man stories I came on board to tell in the first place. Plus the two elements that enticed me onto the book in the first place — **Howard Mackie** as editor and **John Romita, Jr.** as artist — are no longer part of the package. While I'm perfectly happy with the people who are replacing them, the incentive to stay beyond my announced tenure is much diminished. And the coming of extra work, like the X-Men, diminishes it even further.

As far as NAMOR is concerned, I've already planned that #25 is the last one I will pencil. I intend to remain as plotter and scripter. At this stage, **Rick Leonardi** will be the penciller. I'm glad I said

"The X-Men are going to pay my mortgage."

Leonardi, because I usually say **Marc Silvestri** — but it *is* **Leonardi.** There is a little bit less work I'll be doing and that basically adds up to the equivalent of the amount of the work I'll be doing on the two X-books.

I've been telling people that the best thing about doing the X-books is the ton of cash that automatically comes with it. *(Laughter.)* That subsidizes the lesser projects. It subsidizes SHE-HULK for me. I can now do SHE-HULK and not have to worry about whether SHE-HULK will pay my mortgage — which isn't very likely — because the X-Men are going to pay my mortgage.

It's very nice to find myself re-involved with a book that I discover, with every passing day, I have so much emotional involvement still there. To find all that — and that it's going to put a ton of cash in my pocket and allow me to continue with *other* books I've become emotionally involved with . . . what more could anyone ask?

PAT: *A couple of years back, when I interviewed you as you were starting on NAMOR, you were really enthusiastic about the project . . .*

JOHN: I still am.

PAT: *It recently went from newsstand and direct to direct sales only. I assume that's a consequence of its sales not meeting expectations?*

JOHN: Its sales are what I consider pretty bad — it struggles to hit 100,000. Back when I was doing X-MEN the first time around, 100,000 was nice and comfortable and everybody was thrilled if they did 100,000. In fact, X-MEN was doing 145,000 when I left it, which was considered pretty strong.

These days, 100,000 means you go direct-only. It isn't financially viable to do a newsstand book that isn't selling 100,000.

Which is sad. It doesn't really surprise me. I knew going into it that NAMOR is a book that *nobody's* ever been able to sell. Not since the Golden Age, when it didn't sell all that well, either. So, it doesn't surprise me . . . but here's another example of where the X-Men are going to allow me to stay on the book.

PAT: *What do you think is the problem with Namor as a character?*

From X-MEN #4

"I'm doing a history of the Green Lantern Corps."

JOHN: I don't know. Once upon a time I would have said, "All this underwater stuff is just boring . . ." We didn't *do* the underwater stuff and the sales still plummeted.

PAT: *Is it the lack of a flashy costume?*

JOHN: Could be. I've been giving serious thought to the idea of putting him back in the shark-skin thing.

PAT: *On the one hand, then, you're disappointed because you thought you could do something with it; on the other hand, it's sort of what you expected.*

JOHN: Everybody else's reaction was "Hey, **John Byrne's** going to do it; it'll sell millions.

My reaction was, "I dunno. We'll see." Unfortunately, my reaction was nearer the mark. The good thing is, I get to continue with it; if the X-Men thing hadn't come along, I might have had to give up the book altogether and go in search of a more profitable venture, since I do have this mortgage.

I'm doing SHE-HULK. I can't do two direct-only books, unless it's something like my Dark Horse project, which I own.

PAT: *I assume you've finished OMAC?*

JOHN: I've almost finished OMAC.

PAT: *I take it the delay in that was simply to resolicit because they changed the package?*

JOHN: Exactly. They changed the price . . . not the package. It was solicited as a black-and-white book at the color price. And some of us said, "No — what if we *don't* charge the kids for color they're not getting?"

Unfortunately, that meant that it had to be resolicited and delayed. Which means we're missing what **Jonathan Peterson** refers to as our "window of opportunity" — when we would have gotten out *before* all the new X-books. Now, we're delaying it until *after* all the new X-books.

PAT: *That makes sense.*

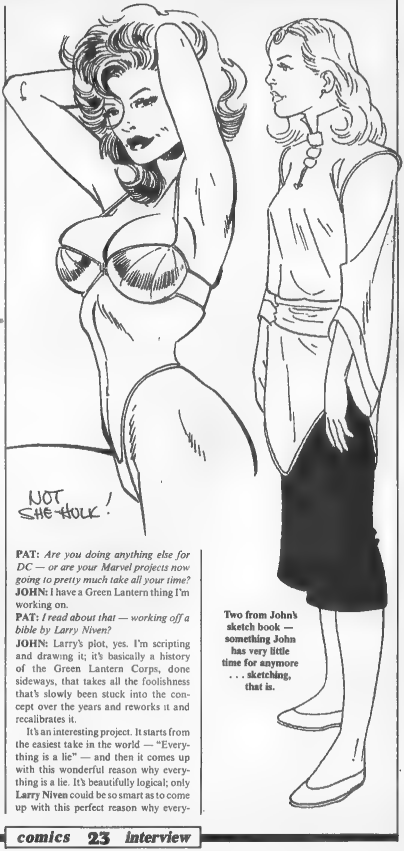
JOHN: Yeah — the last thing I need is to be out there with X-FARCE and both X-books . . .

PAT: *You just said something I can't not follow up on. You just referred to one of the sister mutant books as "X-Farce".* . . .

JOHN: Well, we do that. That's reflexive. We call all the books by silly names; it doesn't mean anything.

PAT: *OK — I couldn't let it slide by, though, John.*

JOHN: I've gotta watch that. I do it in interviews and some of the silly names we use are almost pornographic — so we have to be careful of what we say because it might end up in print. *(Laughter.)*



Two from John's sketch book — something John has very little time for anymore . . . sketching, that is.

PAT: *Are you doing anything else for DC — or are your Marvel projects now going to pretty much take all your time?*

JOHN: I have a Green Lantern thing I'm working on.

PAT: *I read about that — working off a bible by Larry Niven?*

JOHN: Larry's plot, yes. I'm scripting and drawing it; it's basically a history of the Green Lantern Corps, done sideways, that takes all the foolishness that's slowly been stuck into the concept over the years and reworks it and recalibrates it.

It's an interesting project. It starts from the easiest take in the world — "Everything is a lie" — and then it comes up with this wonderful reason why everything is a lie. It's beautifully logical; only **Larry Niven** could be so smart as to come up with this perfect reason why every-

From issue #1 of John's OMAC — pages uncropped.

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"I'll be more than a footnote in the history of comics."

thing we know about the Green Lantern Corps and the Guardians is a lie.

That's kind of exciting.

PAT: *And you're working on — is it NEXT MEN?*

JOHN: NEXT MEN

PAT: *For Dark Horse.*

JOHN: I anticipated that being a slightly confusing title when I came up with it. Now I'm envisioning myself at conventions and having to ask everybody to repeat what they say when they ask me a question: "what are you doing next on X-MEN?".

"Excuse me, NEXT MEN?"

"X-MEN."

I never thought *I* would be the one confused by it.

PAT: *Give me a little background on that one.*

JOHN: The way it happened is the simplest and most prosaic of all reasons. Last year I had my 40th birthday, just past I had my 41st birthday, and I've been very aware since my 40th birthday that I'm now the same age that **Stan Lee** was when he created THE FANTASTIC FOUR with **Jack Kirby.** Jack was 45 and Stan was 41. So I'm in a window now between those ages in which I figure I have to create THE FANTASTIC FOUR, if I'm going to be anything more than a footnote in the history of the comic-book industry.

And that's basically what THE NEXT MEN is — my attempt to create THE FANTASTIC FOUR. Stan sat down and said, "Here's all the stuff as it's been for years — I'm gonna turn it sideways."

I'm now trying to do the same thing, to reinvent the wheel as it were, and say, "Here's my take on everything we've ever seen of the basic superhero genre." It's a tremendously appealing thing for me, because I've been experiencing a growing frustration in the last four or five years — it's probably four or five years that I've been moaning and groaning to people about this — that there are now, because of the structure of the Marvel and DC Universes, so many stories we simply cannot do. We cannot do the first alien contact story, for example, as a real simple, basic comic-book story. It's not only been done — it's been done 27 times. You can't do the first time-travel story; you can't do magic other than how magic has been established in those universes.

So the idea of having a virgin universe in which none of this stuff has ever been done and in which these five guys are the *first* beings with super powers ever to come along — I'm not going to do a **Roy Thomas** here and start installing a whole bunch of Golden-Age characters. There are no Golden-Age characters; these guys are the first, so I can play with all the conventions of comics and just reinvent the wheel.

I'm thinking of reinventing the wheel to the point of doing a GASOLINE ALLEY on this and having it happen in real time — which could be scary as hell.

PAT: *They tried that, didn't they, with the New Universe?*

JOHN: But the New Universe didn't last long enough for it to be even noticeable. Perhaps this won't, *either!* There's always the chance I won't have to worry about it. "Gosh — ten years from now when these guys are pushing their 30s, what's that gonna do to the book?" Well, ten years from now the book may have been gone for eight years. It's going to be an interesting concept, if in fact I don't chicken out at the last minute and say, "Oh no, these guys have gotta be immortal, like everybody else."

PAT: *So what are they like?*

JOHN: What are they like? They're like mutants, only they're not.

It's five characters — I took as my starting point that each would have a single super-ability and each of the super-abilities would be based on things that people *can* do. We don't have anybody with wings, or anybody who turns into fire. We have a guy who's really strong, a guy who's really fast, a girl who's really

Panel from John's upcoming project for Dark Horse — NEXT MEN #1.

© 1991 John Byrne/Dark Horse

"In the '40s, they didn't do the origin until the 10th year."

athletic, a guy with really great eyes who can see the whole electromagnetic spectrum, and a gal who's indestructible — tougher than dirt.

That's where I start, with these five characters who — because of the nature of the first story — have no awareness of the real world and are suddenly thrust into the real world. So they're dealing with the real world while the real world is busy dealing with them. And it's got all these secret government projects.

I had to start somewhere. You know, there are only two origins in the whole world, so I picked the "secret government project" origin.

PAT: *How many origins did you say there were?*

JOHN: I said two. I break it down as technological or non-technological, Superman or Batman — you're either blasted away from a doomed planet or your parents are killed by bad guys. That's pretty much all you've got.

PAT: *Accident or design?*

JOHN: Exactly.

That was the one thing I worried about the least on this project. The origin is just something to get past. It's what happens after the origin that counts. In the Golden Age, they didn't even *do* the origin until the 10th year. "You want to know where this guy came from? His

Cover #0 (that's how J.B. wanted it) to John's NEXT MEN.

©1991 John Byrne/Dark Horse

"I get depressed by the state of the industry today."

mother was shot by a bad guy. There you go." That was as much as they were worried about the origin. I almost got back to that stage — the origin is the least important thing about these guys.

PAT: *Let me get very general here. What is your position, your take, on the state of the comic-book industry today?*

JOHN: I get depressed by the state of the industry today. I really don't like the direction we're going . . . I'm going to alienate everybody who buys my books now.

The direction we're going — in terms of the power the fans have over what is produced — bothers me. It's an indirect power because they can't actually walk into the office and say, "Do this." But

Pencil panels from NAMOR #26, by Jae Lee, story by John Byrne.

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"The approach these days seems not at all story-oriented."

marketing is constantly aware of what sold and what didn't and why. The whole approach these days seems to be not at all story-oriented; it's all event-oriented "Which event can we cook up this year that will sell a ton of books?" That's what SPIDER-MAN #1 and X-FORCE #1 and X-MEN #1 and all these plastic-wrapped, multiple-cover hoo-has are about: They're events.

Consider SPIDER-MAN #1 as an example. I like Todd's stuff, so this is not intended to be a diminishing of **Todd McFarlane** or his work, but they sold 3.5 million copies of that thing, sight unseen. It wasn't even previewed in MARVEL AGE, as far as I know, before they'd sold 3.5 million copies. Which means the fans were buying it without knowing what they were going to get: Todd could have been experimenting with his new stick-figure style for all they knew. *(Laughter.)*

But they bought 3.5 million copies of it. Then, of course, Marvel realized it was a money machine. We used to have a joke in the office — there's an old BC strip in which one of the characters discovers that clams have legs, and he goes around saying, "Clams have legs!" And one of the clams, standing to the side, says, "Now we have to kill him."

We in the industry turned that into "Fans got bucks!" So anytime somebody sold something we'd say, "Wow! Fans got bucks!" Unfortunately, it seems like that's the whole approach these days — the realization that there are people out there who are willing to spend vast amounts of money on these packages

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"On SHE-HULK I trampled the cliche to death."

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SO FAR THIS FEELS JUST A TAD SHORT OF MY BEST ONE SCENARIO.
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BU-UMM, THE INK!
ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES TO DRAWING SHE-HULK IS THAT SHE'S SO BIG IS YOU WORRIES ABOUT FEET!
HEY! HI-POCK ETS!

SHE-HULK pencils complete with various directions, all by John.

without any consideration of the basic validity of the package or the spending of the money. Somehow, we are able to persuade fans to part with $7 million worth of their hard-earned money. That depresses me.

PAT: *Do you think the industry is stagnating a little by not exploring outside the superhero genre?*

JOHN: The genre is fine. The problem is that nobody wants to do anything exploratory *with* the genre. People who dismiss the superhero genre are like people who dismiss westerns, as far as I'm concerned. "The western is dead." No — it just takes somebody to come along and do something different with the western. People certainly woke up when **Alan Moore** did WATCHMEN, because he did something different — or something that was *perceived* as different, which is perhaps a better evaluation.

I'd like to see anything and everything being done in comics. But my own personal first love is the superhero genre and I want to explore the superhero genre in different ways. That's partly what NEXT MEN is all about . . . coming at this same thing from a different direction.

My approach in general at Marvel has been to say, "Well, here are all the cliches — what if rather than trying to explode the cliches, I approach the cliche from a different direction? What if I run right up to the cliche and then turn 90 degrees? Except on SHE-HULK, where I run right up to the cliche and trample it to death.

PAT: *Sometimes on SHE-HULK, I feel like you're running up to the cliche, shaking its hand, and introducing it to the audience.*

JOHN: Many times. One of these days, I'll have her turn to the camera and say, "That was a cliche, in case you didn't catch it." It's delightful to have a character who knows exactly where she is — and why. And can react to things in the comic — without making fun of it, of course. Making fun of the conventions in comics is shooting fish in a barrel. It's too easy. The trick for me with SHE-HULK is to try and have a good time with it without literally poking fun at the genre itself.

That's a waste of time.

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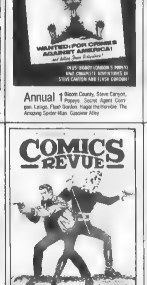

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ON AIR HAWK: "I started off with the Sunday.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you one of Australia's finest adventure cartoonists, John Dixon, who now lives in Arlington, VA. John and I go back to 1969. My respect for him and his work is great. Apart from a row here and there over our working together, it's been quite pleasant and at times even special. Like when Alex Toth and John Dixon spoke about cartooning back in '73 when I worked with Alex Toth on SUPER-FRIENDS at Eric Porter's studio in North Sydney. I'm sorry I lost the tape a long time ago. Now I'd like to refer you to the late John Ryan's book on Australian comics, PANEL BY PANEL, for the following on Mr. Dixon:

"After a quiet beginning, AIR HAWK AND THE FLYING DOCTORS gradually increased its popularity to the point where the HERALD and WEEKLY TIMES agreed to syndicate a daily strip in May 1963. Because of the detailed nature of the strip, Dixon hired Mike Tabrett as an assistant and trained him to take over the Sunday page while Dixon concentrated on the daily strip.

Unlike most U.S. adventure strips, the Sunday and daily continuity on AIR HAWK were separate stories and Dixon continued to write both. Tabrett remained with the Sunday page until it passed to Hart Amos. The introduction of the daily strip seemed to give Dixon new impetus as he polished and refined his technique, gradually removing all trace of the slicker comic-book approach. Of the Big Three, Foster, Raymond and Caniff, only the latter had any influence on his style and even that disappeared with maturity. By the late '60s Dixon had developed a comic-strip technique that was equal to any continuity artist in the world. His careful spotting of blacks assists in giving his panels great depth and heightens the mood and drama of the story. In an era in which continuity strips have suffered at the hands of gag strips, Dixon has continued to produce outstanding work and has secured his place as the finest adventure-strip artist Australia has produced. His work is held in high esteem overseas and AIR HAWK appears in New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Africa, Ireland, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Sweden and Argentina. A number of comics have reprinted the strip in Europe, including the full-colour Spanish series HALCONES DE AERO."

— John Ryan
August, 1977

. . . And now we begin . . .

PAUL POWER: *John, for the comic-book fans and cartoonists here that wouldn't know too much about you except for reprints of AIR HAWK in the MENOMONEE FALLS GAZETTE, a comic-strip newspaper that came out in the '70s, could you give us a bit of a recap of when you started on AIR HAWK and comic strips and such?*

JOHN DIXON: I do not remember the date, I'm helpless with dates —

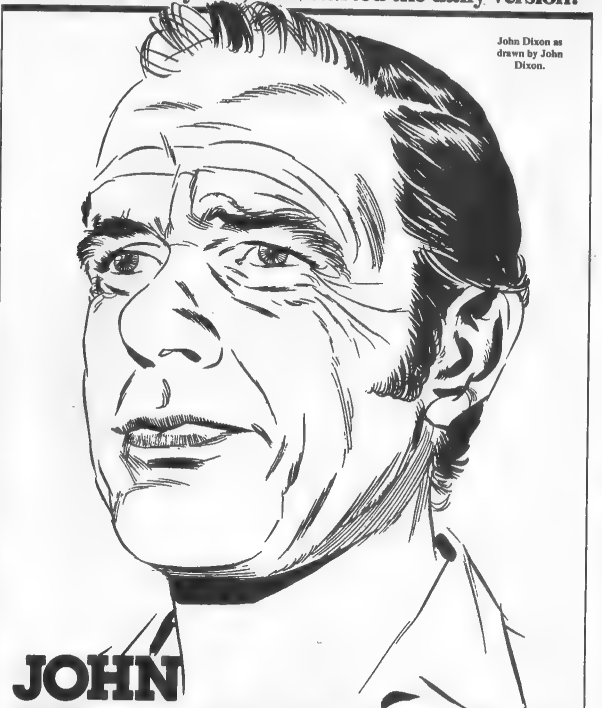
PAUL: *It was in '58.*

JOHN: Okay, yeah, and I was doing it for 28 years. I started off with the Sunday, did that I think for five years, and then I started the daily version as well. At the beginning I was doing both the Sunday and the daily.

PAUL: *Now, I think before you actually sold the strip itself to THE SUN*

John inking over Paul Power's pencils from Paul's EAST MEETS WEST #5, "Tough as Nails"

Did that for five years, then started the daily version."



John Dixon as drawn by John Dixon.

JOHN DIXON

CATMAN ©1991 Free Publications / DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS Dragicevic ©1991 Slaven / ROCKET TEEN ©1991 David Stevens
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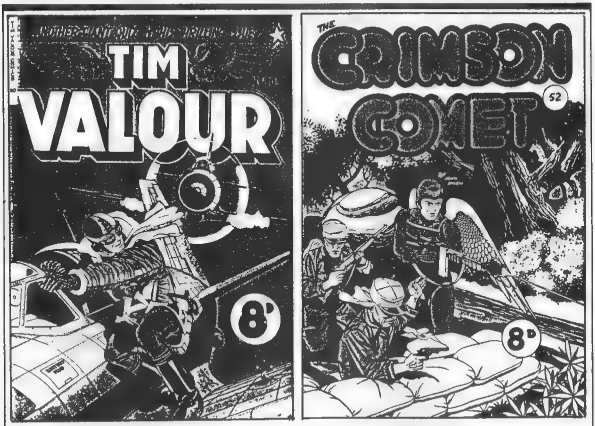
"I remember Sunday comics. TARZAN, GASOLINE



Two covers by John. The one on the left is from 1951, the other from '53.

HERALD It was collected into a comic book, the one about the X-13, which was the first story. Was that before or during the publication?

JOHN: Oh boy, now you're going back. I think that was before I started the daily — I *think*. I can't remember really, but that was published by Horowitz Publications.

PAUL: *And you used to paint paperback covers?*

JOHN: Yeah, paperback covers for them. That was my first color work.

PAUL: *Now, you first started, I mean drawing the comics and everything, when you were about sixteen.*

JOHN: I remember the first story that I ever did was titled "The Sky Pirates," and that was done for **John Edwards,** Leisure Productions. I ended up doing comic books for him for ten years.

PAUL: *And that was in the '50s.*

JOHN: Yeah, and the first one was TIM VALOR, followed by THE CRIMSON COMET, and then I did miscellaneous other fill stories. That was up till the time that the embargo was lifted on American comics.

PAUL: *That was about '58 or something.*

JOHN: Again, don't remember the dates, but it *killed* the comic-book market, the *local* comic-book market.

PAUL: *Which was mainly a black-and-white market.*

JOHN: *Exclusively* black-and-white.

PAUL: *Except for the Disney comics that were reprinted in color.*

JOHN: Yeah I remember **John Edwards** got the rights to reprint SUPER DUCK and Disney sued because they said SUPER DUCK was a pinch of DONALD DUCK. Disney had sued the American publishers that did SUPER DUCK and *lost* the case, so when it was offered to **John Edwards** they assured him that the case had been fought and Disney had lost and therefore he had no problem. But as soon as he published it Disney jumped on him. It went to court in Sydney — I remember it *clearly* because I had to do some blowups of the SUPER DUCK characters with a pantograph —

PAUL: *Wow.*

JOHN: They had to be shown in court and I had to sign an affidavit to say that these were exact reproductions of the SUPER DUCK characters, and then the lawyers went to work then pointing out that the SUPER DUCK characters were different. They were only little details but enough to back the copyright.

PAUL: *Super Duck would have been a superhero?*

JOHN: No, it was just . . . I forget now.

PAUL: *You drew on that?*

JOHN: No, I only had to draw the enlargements for the court case. Anyway, Disney lost again.

PAUL: *These lawsuits are —*

JOHN: It's the national sport out here. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *What I want to get at, Tim Valor was kind of like a TERRY AND THE PIRATES type character, wouldn't you say?*

JOHN: Similar, yeah.

PAUL: *Were you a pilot at that stage, or were you taking flight lessons at that stage?*

JOHN: I got my pilot's license, yeah, *during* this period.

PAUL: *You did mainly brushwork then, right?*

JOHN: More brush than pen. I used more penwork as the years went by, but all the —

PAUL: *Was it mainly for efficiency's sake, using the pen?*

JOHN: I used the pen mainly for just

ALLEY. After the war, TERRY AND THE PIRATES."

foundation work, you know, before I started stabbing into it with the brush. I found that by using *all* brush my work tended to be a little on the heavy side. I like to vary it a bit.

PAUL: *TIM VALOR and THE CRIMSON COMET, they were in the '50s — about when, '55?*

JOHN: You tell me.

PAUL: *I think it was about '55. You also did CATMAN around '57, '58.*

JOHN: Yeah, Frew Publications asked me to revamp — they'd bought the rights to CATMAN from some American publisher — they asked me to update CATMAN, which I did. I did a few episodes of that.

PAUL: *About fifteen issues, I think.*

JOHN: It might have been, yeah.

PAUL: *And they reprinted them again in the '60s because of the whole BATMAN thing, because it was kind of like BATMAN.*

JOHN: Yeah. I think all publishers tended to jump on the bandwagon of that popular strip.

PAUL: *What made you want to draw comics in the first place?*

JOHN: Well, actually, it happened by accident. When I first started I was working as an advertising artist —

PAUL: *This was like 1950 or so?*

JOHN: No, this was just after the war.

PAUL: *And you were about sixteen then?*

JOHN: Something like that. One day someone said to me, "Look, one of the local comics is just rough as guts, you can do better than this." I looked at it and thought, "Well, you wouldn't have to be *too* good to do better than this." So I started doing a sample comic-book story, and that was "Sky Pirates." I worked at night, after work, on this thing over a period of six months — six months to do eighteen pages. I learned as I went along.

When I took it in, I just happened to look in this doorway and I saw ACTION COMICS up on the board in the foyer, so I went in to see him first. I went up, showed it to him, and he offered me a job on the spot, full-time doing comic books — that was **John Edwards.**

PAUL: *Were you a big fan of comics prior to that?*

JOHN: I used to as a kid. I can remember, we used to just *live* for the arrival of the Sunday comics. I was living in the country. The most exciting thing that ever happened was the arrival of the comics on Sunday mornings. *(Laughter.)* Incidentally, my sister still lives there, Kempsey, New South Wales.

PAUL: *What were the strips that you liked, like TERRY AND THE PIRATES and FLASH GORDON and stuff?*

JOHN: There was TARZAN, that was one of them, and I think it was the original TARZAN strip. There was GASOLINE ALLEY. After the war when they lifted the embargo TERRY AND THE PIRATES first appeared in THE SUNDAY SUN, that was when I first saw it, and I was *immediately* very impressed.

PAUL: *That would have still been Milton Caniff, sure.*

JOHN: Milton Caniff, yeah, that was his. This was the first time I ever saw a comic done in this cinematic style. It was *really* something. And it was in full color too, by the way.

PAUL: *Oh, yeah. I know that the printers at the SUN, they really cared, they really* enjoyed *printing the Sunday comics.*

JOHN: Yeah, it was good quality stuff. And then, of course, it went back into black and white because it was too expensive. But that was actually what really started my mental processes going as far as doing a strip was concerned, and it wasn't until years later, it wasn't until the comic-book business went bust, that I thought I'd do six sample strips for a Sunday.

PAUL: *When was this, '55, '56?*

John Dixon's early work on CATMAN.

COME ON, WE MUST STOP HIM BEFORE HE GETS AWAY
WERE TOO LATE! HES ALREADY TAKING OFF
STANTON WILL STAY HERE - BUT ILL MAKE SURE HE WONT TALK
DIVE FOR COVER! HES GOING TO ATTACK
KEEP DOWN AND LIE STILL, MAKE HIM THINK HE GOT US
IF HE DECIDES TO MAKE A SECOND RUN - HE MIGHT

"I used to do 15 pages a week — getting started at 6 in the

JOHN: Between the time that I stopped working for **John Edwards** and the time I started working on AIR HAWK . . . I think it must have been about a five-year interval. I'm *hopeless!* I can never remember dates. I can remember the chronological order that I did things in, but I cannot remember the dates.

PAUL: *It looked to me, from looking at your earlier stuff like THE CRIMSON COMET — who was a superhero character who had these wings, and he had a hunchback —*

JOHN: It was the only way I could work out how to hide his wings. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *But you drew that for 70 issues or something, did a lot of them.*

JOHN: Yes, I was working like crazy.

PAUL: *And you were doing two books at the time, right? You were doing TIM VALOR at the same time?*

JOHN: TIM VALOR and THE CRIMSON COMET.

PAUL: *And how many pages were they, 25 pages apiece, maybe more?*

JOHN: Yeah, but I think that they used to use a filler in the back.

PAUL: *Yeah, but you used to ink, letter and write —*

JOHN: Everything, the whole bit.

PAUL: *And you never had an assistant in those days?*

JOHN: No.

PAUL: *So, you'd average about 50 pages a month, right?*

JOHN: I used to do fifteen pages a week. That's getting started to work at 6:00 in the morning and working till 9:30 at night, seven days a week.

PAUL: *Jesus!*

JOHN: It killed me.

PAUL: *What about your love life?*

JOHN: *What* love life? *(Laughter.)* I just read about that. It was tough. But the thing was that I had an opportunity to — we were paid piecework, you know, so much a page, and it wasn't *much* but the number of pages I turned out I made enough to buy a block of land where we built the house that you know about.

PAUL: *Oh, that's beautiful, yeah. I first got in contact with John when I was about fifteen or sixteen, wrote you a letter and came up to see you — you lived about 80 miles away from me —*

JOHN: I thought you was fourteen. I remember getting a letter from you when you were fourteen, you mentioned your age in the letter, and you were a real comic fanatic.

PAUL: *Yeah, crazy. You must have thought I was nuts.*

JOHN: All comic fanatics are nuts. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Anyway, John's house on Banganhead overlooked a beach, it was like cliffside — it looked like something out of MAGNUM P.I. in Hawaii or something.*

JOHN: Yeah.

PAUL: *Anyway, why don't we talk about the characters. Jim Hawk, where did he come from, how did it come about? How did you come up with AIR HAWK AND THE FLYING DOCTORS?*

JOHN: When I started thinking about doing a daily strip there was no good doing stuff that had already been done from Americans, you know, like oops or whatever. Before I could sell it to Australian newspapers I knew that it had to be something different, something that they couldn't get from the syndicates. And it had to be Australian, because they could get the American stuff cheaply.

So I thought, "Well, I like drawing airplanes, I like drawing Outback stuff, so it's either going to be a theme on the Northern Territory Mounted Police or something to do with flying. Well, a flying doctor might be a good basis for a flying strip. Hang on, we can combine the whole lot!" But I didn't want to tie myself —

PAUL: *You wanted the police adventure —*

JOHN: And the flying doctor. But I didn't want a character that was tied

Panels from TIM VALOR, by Dixon, circa 1950.

THIS WILL PUT AN END TO YOUR MEDDLING, CAPTAIN!
WOW! HE'S A BETTER SHOT THAN I ANTICIPATED— I MUST BETTER PUT MY PLAN INTO OPERATION BEFORE HE REALLY GETS ME!
I HOPE TO GOODNESS THIS FOOLS HIM, IF IT DOESN'T, I'M SUNK!
SMOKE CONTROL
A MOMENT LATER THICK BLACK SMOKE POURS FROM THE EXHAUSTS AND HIS SHIP SPIRALS EARTHWARD.
THAT'S SETTLED HIS HASH, NOW TO COMPLETE MY WORK.
I'D LIKE TO WAIT AND SEE HIM CRASH BUT I HAVE NO TIME
I HAVE ENOUGH EXPLOSIVE STOWED ABOARD HIS CRAFT TO BLOW THE WHOLE DROME OFF THE MAP
IT'S QUITE UNFORTUNATE THAT THE PLANE SHOULD DIVE OUT OF CONTROL AND ACCIDENT -LY HIT VILLIER'S HANGARS, HA! HA! HA! HA! HERE WE GO!!

morning and working until 9:30 at night, 7 days a week."

down to the Royal Flying Doctor Service because they're autonomous in each state. I wanted someone that could roam all over, so I created this situation where Jim Hawk owns this airline which is known as Air Hawk and he provided a relief service to the Flying Doctor network, standing in with Doctor Matthews.

So, that's how that started. But because it was *involved* like that it used to create problems of its own. You had to abide by the rules and the regulations within the Flying Doctor network, and also police regulations, so you couldn't sort of let your head go too much.

PAUL: *Really? I didn't know that. So, you had all these people saying do this this way? Was that the deal going in?*

JOHN: No. I did a bit of research, found out for instance that Flying Doctor is not allowed to fly even if he has a pilot's license the doctor is the doctor and the pilot is the pilot and that's the way it is. I went out with a flying doctor once. The doctor was a real Jim Hawk character, he was American and young and good-looking, and the pilot was a real sophisticated Englishman with a beard, always immaculately dressed. Every time they would land in a place where they weren't known people would assume that the pilot was the doctor and the doctor was the pilot.

PAUL: *Had they seen your strip?*

JOHN: Yeah.

PAUL: *What did they think of it? They must have liked it. You were in their plane.*

JOHN: Yeah, except the people that are in the business can always see the errors — "We don't do this quite this way," you know. But I was expecting this.

PAUL: *Well, when I worked with you on the strip it was heavily researched, that's what I liked about it. Your strip, like a lot of the better American strips, I think, is far more cinematic than most guys', and I guess that came from following the Caniff stuff.*

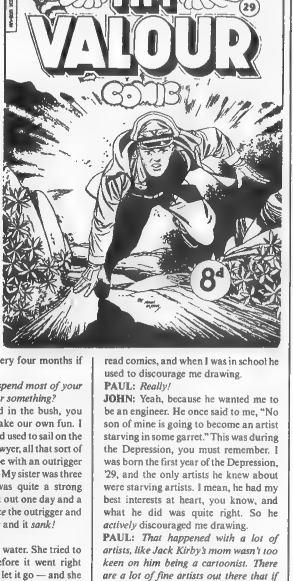
JOHN: Probably, and also I used to, when I was illustrating, I *thought* in a cinematic style. The close-ups, medium shots, long shots, this is the way that I always visualized my work. It made it easier to work, actually.

PAUL: *Were you always a film fan?*

JOHN: Yes. I was never allowed to go to the movies when I was a kid, though. My father was very . . . it was only the very rare film that he thought was suitable.

PAUL: *Was he a minister or something?*

JOHN: He was headmaster of a school and he was very strict. We'd go to see



Cover of TIM VALOR #29, new series, again by John Dixon, circa 1954.

films maybe once every four months if we were lucky.

PAUL: *So, did you spend most of your spare time drawing or something?*

JOHN: No. We lived in the bush, you know; we used to make our own fun. I made myself a raft and used to sail on the river just like Tom Sawyer, all that sort of stuff. I built this canoe with an outrigger and a mast and a sail. My sister was three years old and she was quite a strong swimmer. She took it out one day and a gust of wind hit, *broke* the outrigger and the thing turned over and it *sank!*

PAUL: *Oh, my!*

JOHN: In fairly deep water. She tried to pull it into shore before it went right down, but she had to let it go — and she felt real bad about it, you know, because she'd sank my boat. Anyway, then I started building a diving helmet. I was going to go down and salvage this boat. *(Laughter.)* Until Father found out what I was planning. He put a stop to that; otherwise I wouldn't be here today probably.

PAUL: *Yeah, yeah. So, there was your sense of adventure anyway. You didn't need the serials.*

JOHN: That's right.

PAUL: *So, would you spend a lot of time reading comics and such?*

JOHN: Actually, my father didn't let me read comics, and when I was in school he used to discourage me drawing.

PAUL: *Really!*

JOHN: Yeah, because he wanted me to be an engineer. He once said to me, "No son of mine is going to become an artist starving in some garret." This was during the Depression, you must remember. I was born the first year of the Depression, '29, and the only artists he knew about were starving artists. I mean, he had my best interests at heart, you know, and what he did was quite right. So he *actively* discouraged me drawing.

PAUL: *That happened with a lot of artists, like Jack Kirby's mom wasn't too keen on him being a cartoonist. There are a lot of fine artists out there that if they would have listened to their parents they wouldn't have done it.*

JOHN: Well, they were worried about their security. It wasn't until I started doing comic books that he realized I was making some money; he didn't worry so much about my security then.

PAUL: *Was there much of a fraternity in the '30s between the local cartoonists? Did you socialize with them much?*

JOHN: No, I didn't know any of them.

PAUL: *What about Keith Chatto?*

JOHN: Oh, Keith I knew. I first met him at **John Ryan's**, when **John Ryan** lived out in the western suburbs somewhere,

ON WRITING: "They were the set characters, then you

and there was a bit of a get-together of comic artists and Keith came in and filmed it for showing on one of the channels.

PAUL: *Oh, I saw that film. I'd like to get that! He also shot just a little five-minute thing on you making AIR HAWK.*

JOHN: That's right, which I've still got a copy. It was originally shot on 16-mm. He then had that transferred onto 8-mm which slowed the action down; it was in slow motion. I had it transferred onto tape just recently, American tape, but unfortunately it had faded badly and it's in very slow motion — it looked really bad. They said they couldn't speed it up. But I told Keith about it last week and he said he still has the master film, so he's going to have a tape made from the master film with the action correct.

PAUL: *I'd like to see him about that. That would be a good thing to show at conventions.*

JOHN: Yes, it's interesting because it was the early days. It's when **Michael Tabrett** was working for me because he's in it.

PAUL: *Okay, the characters in AIR HAWK, you've got Jim Hawk —*

JOHN: He's the pilot.

PAUL: *A detective sort of character almost.*

JOHN: Well, yeah, an adventurer. A charter operator, charter pilot. And Doctor Hal Matthews, who was only involved in the stories when there was Flying Doctor's work involved. There's

Portrait painting by John Dixon from the magazine DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, circa 1990. On the next page, reprints of AIR HAWK

bring in the incidental characters — the ones you kill off."

Janet Grant, the romantic interest. There was Sgt. Bob Fenton, who was the Northern Territory cop.

PAUL: *And there was Gordon Carpenter, the ASIO guy.*

JOHN: Yes, he'd come in occasionally. And there was Aunt Ellie Dangarfield, an old lady that was his aunt, lived on this big Outback station. They were the main characters.

PAUL: *Who was the black guy?*

JOHN: Oh, Johnny Rainbow.

PAUL: *You brought him in around 1974 or something.*

JOHN: I don't know. They were the set characters, and then of course you bring in the incidental characters as you go — the ones you have to kill off. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *I know the one I did with you had Ellie Dangarfield and I drew that character to look like Bob Hawk, the Prime Minister. He wasn't Prime Minister, he was still like a trade unionist or something. You got a letter on that, remember.*

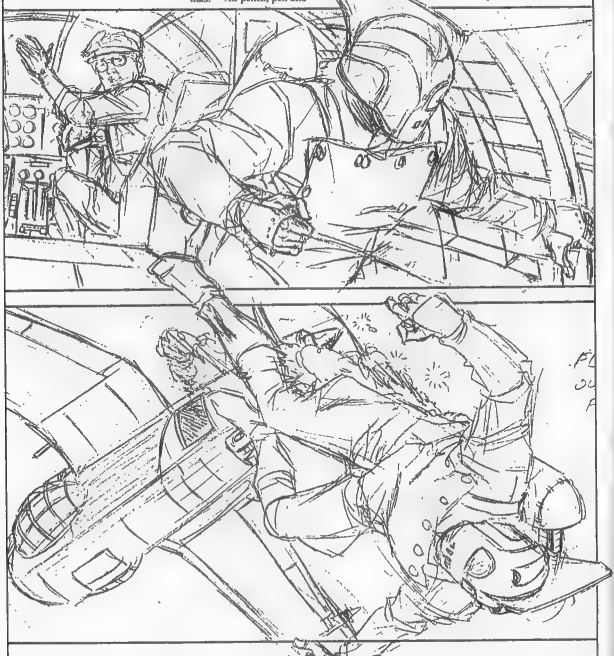
NO POINT IN KEEPING DINNER HOT FOR LORD MUCK ANY LONGER--!
MAY AS WELL HAVE MINE--
--THEN WH...THE @#%& ...!!!
BURRP!?
THAT SCREAM! SOUNDED LIKE MAXINE!!
MAXINE!! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
WHERE IN THE DEVIL IS SHE?
MORE OF THOSE BIG FOOT-PRINTS-! AND SIGNS OF A STRUGGLE! GOOD GOD!!
IT WOULD SEEM THE WAY TO A YOWIE'S HEART IS THROUGH HIS STOMACH— IN WHICH CASE...
MAXINE HAS MADE QUITE A HIT WITH HER POT OF BEEF STEW
SCRAPE SCRAPE
THE TRACKS LEAD UP THE MOUNTAIN—! STRAIGHT FOR THAT CAVE!
MAXINE'S GLASSES— BUT NO SIGN OF HER SHOE PRINTS— ONLY THE YOWIE TRACKS
WHICH MEANS SHE WAS CARRIED!
THE QUESTION IS—
DEAD OR ALIVE--!?

"About five years ago, they had the inaugural Black and

JOHN: I don't remember that.
PAUL: *They thought were doing Bob Hawk as the villain, you don't remember that?*
JOHN: No. I remember **Bob Hawk** made the presentation to me at the first Black and White Artists Awards.
PAUL: *When was that, '83?*
JOHN: Oh . . .
PAUL: *Must have happened when I was out of the country.*
JOHN: Yes, it was. It happened about five years ago, they had the inaugural Black and White Artists Awards in Sydney. It was like the Oscars, you know, and they have categories and all the artists are judged by their peers. They have books sent out with samples of everyone's work and all the artists vote for all the other artists.

Anyway, I was lucky enough to pull off the award for the best illustrator of an adventure strip and **Bob Hawk** made the presentation. Second year I pulled it off again, so I have the two Stanleys, which are like statuettes. The Stanley, the statuette, is — do you remember a

Here, two panels from Disney's ROCKETEER adaptation (the other one). On the next page are the finished inks. All pencil, pen and brush work by John Dixon.



White Artists' Awards in Sydney. It was like the Oscars."

"The award was two guys hanging off a girder. Bottom

A Purposeful
Evolution of
Slumberg
By Gregory R. Copley, Editor-in-Chief
Another of Adam's paintings, this one for the opening pages of an article entitled "The Purposeful Evolution of Slumberg".

guy says, 'For God's sake, stop laughing. This is serious.'"

AIR HAWK and the FLYING DOCTORS
by JOHN DIXON
WHO OR WHY—I HAVEN'T A CLUE—/ BUT I ASSURE YOU SOMEBODY HAS GONE TO A LOT OF EFFORT TO KEEP THIS PLANE IN "SERVICEABLE" CONDITION!
YOU MEAN THAT THING CAN FLY?
IT'S POSSIBLE—/ BUT IF YOU'RE THINKING OF PUTTING IT TO THIS TRASH—COUNT ME OUT!
YOU SAID IT'S AIRWORTHY SO WHY NOT—? IT'D SAVE US HAVING TO HAUL IT OUT BY ROAD!
FLYABLE OR NOT—THIS SHOKI WAS MODIFIED AS A KAMIKAZE PLANE! IT'S PACKED WITH ENOUGH HIGH EXPLOSIVE TO WIPE OUT THE ENTIRE OASIS!
SO IT'S A SUICIDE PLANE—/ A FLYING BOMB! THE EXPLOSIVE CAN BE REMOVED!
AFTER THIRTY YEARS IT COULD BE HIGHLY UNSTABLE, MR COOMBS...
—THE SLIGHTEST BUMP COULD SET IT OFF
WHAT IN THE DEVIL WAS THAT?
THE CHOPPER! THE FUEL TANKS HAVE EXPLODED!
GET BACK, COOMBS—/ THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO TO SAVE HER!
WHAT COULD HAVE CAUSED IT?
THAT, MR HANNIBAL, IS A VERY GOOD QUESTION!

A three-day sequence from AIR HAWK showing Dixon's ability to build suspense and handle panel-to-panel continuity dramatically. Observe the detail in each panel and the effective manner in which Dixon manages to tell the story in the last panel of the second strip.

famous cartoon by **Stan Cross**, it was two guys hanging off this girder, one is hanging onto this guy's pants and his pants are starting to come down and the guy on the top is laughing, the guy on the bottom is saying, "For God's sake stop laughing, this is serious!"

PAUL: *Yeah, yeah!*

JOHN: That is the statuette, the girder and the two guys hanging under it. Anyway, the first two years — the first year I was eligible, the second year I was eligible because I had been producing AIR HAWK at the beginning of the year, but the next year I wasn't eligible anymore because I hadn't produced any new work within that twelve-month period.

PAUL: *Who won it then, Monty Wedd?*

JOHN: I think . . . Monty won it one year. There's been about five of them now.

PAUL: *So, there are still some adventure strips going?*

JOHN: Well, Monty was still going.

End of part 1. In part 2, next issue, John talks about AIR HAWK on TV, more on the Australian comics scene, and how he happened to wind up living in Washington. Be here!

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

DAK (seated) with Blue Oyster Cult's Eric Bloom, ex-editor-in-chief Jim Shooter and writer Roger Stern back at the old Marvel Bullpen.

HORNSWOOP ME BUNGO PONY (HELP!!)

Dear Mr. Kraft

In COMICS INTERVIEW #99 you solicit reader comments. Since I've been meaning to write to you for some time now, I decided to take this opportunity despite the lack of a space bar on my computer.

You know, it was back in the mid-'70s that I first became familiar with your work. You became one of my favorite writers during your stint on THE DEFENDERS. As a matter of fact, waaaayyyy back in high school (early '80s) I did a report on the nature of power as examined by you in your "Sergei" storyline. However, your most important influence on me, oddly enough, is musical. When I first began to explore the glory and wonder of music I needed someone to point me in the right direction, to bring intelligent music to my attention. Where else to turn but comics, my major hobby at the time? So I searched through those DEFENDERS and looked up those groups that good ol' DAK had dedicated comics to, whose pictures appeared in FOOM with that bizarre intellectual writer. It was thus that I discovered the work of both **Rush** and the **Blue Oyster Cult** (sorry, no umlaut on this computer). Both groups proved pivotal in the gradual process of developing the sophistication of my musical sensibility. And those **Pearlman** lyrics! But that was the problem. If a friend of mine hadn't had the BOC sheet music anthology, I would never have known many of those twisted, evocative lines. Unfortunately, **Cult** policy is not to include lyrics on their albums, and I discovered the group after they had stopped listing the free lyrics offer. Many times I considered writing to you to see if you had those lyrics. Then in '88 IMAGINOS arrived. This is perhaps the ultimate BOC album, and it, too, lacks lyrics. I know from past experience that it is often useless to try to guess what **Pearlman** has written ("Hornswoop me bungo pony"????), and you mentioned the album recently, so here I am asking what I wished to to ask all these years: *David Anthony Kraft, do you have these lyrics, and if so could you tell me how to obtain them?*

Well, thanks for reading all this. I'm looking forward to the next 100 issues (though I'd kind of like to see some new comics material by that unusual writer of the '70s . . .)!

Steven Tice
Calliope Comics
519 Valentine Hill Road
Bellefonte, PA 16823

Alas, Steven, at this point it is nearly impossible to imagine a return to writing comics — but, as they say, stranger things have happened at sea. I do have fond memories of those days, mostly at Marvel, and appreciate your kind words.

As for the lyrics to IMAGINOS, I share your desire to ogle them with my own orbs, so if you — or any other readers out there — do find a copy, please pass it along to me, too.

By the way, I want to take this opportunity to recommend Jane Wiedlin's two solo albums, particularly the hard-to-find first one. Her voice takes some getting used to — but her sincerity is contagious and overcomes her unusual (almost Yoko-esque) voice. I also recommend the last Go-Go's album, TALK SHOW (she wrote all their best songs). Belinda Carlisle has better pipes, perhaps, but she doesn't bring the same emotional vulnerability to Wiedlin's songs. There's also one cut by Wiedlin on the PRETTY WOMAN soundtrack — and listen for the forthcoming new Go-Go's reunion album.

— DAK

BACK ISSUES 'R' US!

Hi, Dave:

Some time ago, my local comic dealer introduced me to your magazine. Actually, I only read and follow the various comic books, but he was persistent. I was aware of your comic career at Marvel and DC, so he didn't have to push too far. Well, I liked it. I came back a second time, then a third. And now I'm on the list for each new COMICS INTERVIEW.

But all those back issues. "Ugh!" Well, here's the first of many-to-come back-issue orders.

Also, how about an interview with Marvel's **Joe Sinnott**? I've been following his work since he drew the old "Arrowhead" issues, to these many years ago.

and his longtime marriage (or it seems) to Marvel.

Fred Bol
1687 Culver Drive
London, Ontario
CANADA N5V 3K1

THE FINAL SOLUTION

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW:

Back when I picked up CI #1, I liked the format but wondered how you'd sustain it once you'd interviewed all the "fan favorites." I guess you showed me. Congratulations on your 100th issue.

I've been reading and collecting COMICS INTERVIEW right along from the beginning. Somehow along the way I missed a couple issues: #73 the distributor never delivered, #84 sold out before I could grab a copy. Hey, gotta keep the set complete. Please send me those back issues.

Randy H. Crawford
911 Park St. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6241

There is a . . . heh . . . heh . . . solution, Randy . . . a final solution: subscribe! Yes! It's a more reliable method of never missing an issue of INTERVIEW — and it's a lot less expensive in the long run!

— DAK

JLA/AVENGERS: WHAT'S NEW?

To COMICS INTERVIEW:

I was very glad when I received your issue about the story that up to now (as far as I know) still waits to come out. I know Marvel and DC already made four crossovers together, which I'm looking to buy very soon now at my local comic shop in Antwerp. They take in comics and other artwork from all over the world. I go there twice a month to collect my usual DC and Marvel titles. The four crossovers will come out as a trade paperback.

I also hope for a similar paperback containing the original Superman/Flash race, the battle between Superman and Wonder Woman, Superman and Captain Marvel, and Superman vs. Muhammed Ali.

I would be very excited if an Avengers/JLA battle, team-up would finally see the light. Reading about it in your Special Edition **George Perez** interview was very interesting, especially when I saw his first drawings on it. Surely, that must mean there will come another and definite project in the near future.

Being an older fan of both companies (since childhood), I do hope to read about it again when they decide to give it another try. Please give me a sign if there are new developments in the making for a JLA/Avengers story.

All these years of reading SUPERMAN, BATMAN, SPIDER-MAN, X-MEN, FANTASTIC FOUR, AVENGERS, JUSTICE LEAGUE, limited, one-shots, WHO'S WHO and a few independents (whatever happened to the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS?) must have made me somewhat on the level with U.S. superheroes and their adventures, private lives, friends and enemies. Still, neither DC nor Marvel, nor AMAZING HEROES have ever published a letter of mine in their readers column. I tried a few times, but stopped doing so long ago. You are the only company that has responded to my existence, for which I thank you.

As an adult, I still keep buying superhero comics, but I wouldn't do so anymore if the drawings and stories had kept their touch of the '60s or '70s — being childlike without the element of realism. I'm glad this is not the case. Why superheroes? Perhaps because I still like to hold on to a fantasy, and because there aren't any costumed colorful superpeople in reality.

Michael Vitalis
Peltzerstr 15
500 Lier
BELGIUM

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (404) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

INTERVIEW reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

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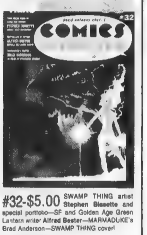

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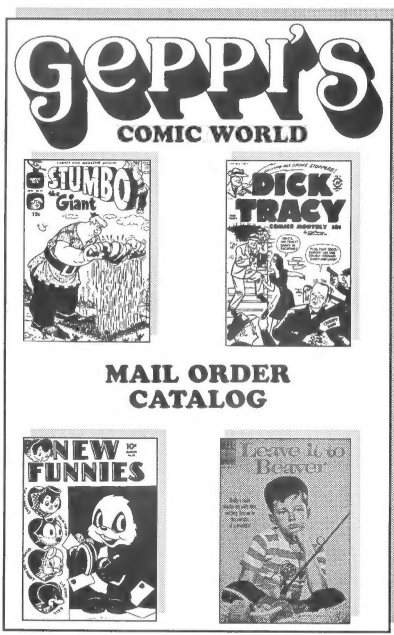

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